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ABSTRACT

The state and status of educational knowledge can be vastly improved in two ways: by looking beyond classroom settings for potential applications, and by broadening the vision of the usefulness of educational knowledge to include other professional fields requiring the skills and knowledge fundamental in education. A changed conception of what educational knowledge includes as well as programmatic changes in departments of education are needed. Educational knowledge can be applied to educational research, program planning, management and evaluation, technical consultation, advocacy, and industrial training. Programs in education should be expanded to include such professional possibilities. For example, incorporating a research course into the education program would allow students to consider later work in policy and program analysis; courses in educational media and computers would open the way to technology-based professions. This proposed expansion of educational programs requires considerable cooperation and collaboration on the part of the various academic departments. Great strides can be made in changing the general perception of education and teaching by realizing that educational knowledge is a commodity valuable to many fields of work and that teaching is just one of many things one might do with an education degree. In this case, minimal program changes can go far toward accomplishing this changed perception. (LP)

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A Proposal to Expand the Fields of Practice of Educational Knowledge

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A Proposal To Expand the Fields of Practice
of Educational Knowledge

What do I know as an educator? What comprises my knowledge base, and how useful is it? Some would say that education is a collection of pedagogical strategies, goals and objectives, skills hierarchies, and the ability to plan and communicate. Others would see education as an amalgam of perspectives, theories and research adopted from parent disciplines because of their applicability to the world of the classroom.

The critics of education's knowledge base are many: Diane Ravitch has written about the many constituencies whose interests and philosophies have inevitably conflicted, leaving education without a consistent sound set of beliefs.[1] What remains instead is a loosely bound package of methods and gimmicks varying with geography and history. Presumably, education is so bound by volatile public sentiment and immediate economic conditions that it can never claim a life of its own or a usefulness beyond the here-and-now of contemporary classrooms.

Philip Jackson has explained how the exigencies of classroom life mandate that teachers suspend reflective thought in favor of reflexive action. Thorough examination of purpose and principle is dysfunctional in a roomful of twenty-odd individuals in constant activity.[2] "Teaching is...like preparing meals in a restaurant," said Harry Broudy, "Neither the menus nor the recipes are grounded in a coherent thery of nutrition or anything else--except possibly the economics of restaurant-keeping or the art of cookery."[3]

Despite the claims of teachers' organizations, sociologists agree that the professionalization of teaching has been hampered

not only by public stinginess but also by teachers' inability to refer to a rigorous training in educational theory and research in which to ground their teaching practice.[4] Teachers themselves complain that their training was too easy and inadequate.[5] Yet the traditional wisdom is that educational theory and research have little if anything to do with classroom reality. Students have always been advised by teachers and principals to lay aside their college training and take up "reality." "Learning by doing" is translated in field experience training to mean that no knowledge base is useful except that which comes from direct and immediate experience. This is, by the way, another case of Dewey misread: of "experience" without educative criteria, of practice without theory.[6]

I agree that the educational knowledge communicated in many of today's teacher training programs and departments of education is inadequate. I believe also that this inadequacy is an important element in the longheld and widespread dissatisfaction with education both of the public and within the universities. The situation is not, however, inevitable. The problem, though, lies not so much in the need to find new frontiers for study by educational theorists and researchers. The problem lies more in the restricted use to which educational knowledge has been put.

This paper is not another in the many calls for schools to regard more seriously the stock of theory and research in education, to link more closely theory and practice, though I firmly believe that needs to happen. Rather, I take the view here that the state and status of educational knowledge can be vastly improved by looking b eyond classroom settings for its application, by

broadening our vision of the usefulness of educational knowledge to include other fields of work needing the skills and knowledge found in education. We need both a changed conception of what educational knowledge includes and some pertinent programmatic changes in departments of education.

I do not advocate that we turn away from a concern with teaching. That is my own first concern. We must address the fact, however, that endeavors such as educational research, program planning, management and evaluation; technical consultation; advocacy; and industrial training, to mention only a few examples, require much of what is offered already in education programs. By removing the constraint on the study of education imposed by its having only one context for practice, we remove many of the limitations which have kept education from presenting itself in all its usefulness.

In view of current economic and demographic conditions, this single context for practice is critically damaging. The poor job market for teachers leaves education graduates feeling trained for nothing, turns bright and ambitious young people from majoring in education, and depresses the status of education programs precariously lower within colleges and universities. Young women, conscious of new and more "realistic" work opportunities, run fast from this traditional "women's work." I have heard many students, male and female, say heir hearts are in education but their heads (and their parents) tell them teaching jobs are unlikely and unworthy of their intellectual and financial potential. The business world assumes that teachers know little that can be applied to their work, and, in fact, many teachers make the same assumption. Retraining programs for teachers are compromised by teachers' assumptions

that teaching is the only work they could ever do.

It is time to expand programs in education, and their concurrent concept of educational knowledge, to include possibilities besides teaching such as those mentioned above. Examples of minor program changes and ways in which existing program offerings can be reconceptualized follow:

A course in research methods, already typically required of other social and behavioral science majors, would allow education students to consider work related to policy and program analysis. A course in management would allow an education student to add administrative skills to training and curriculum development skills to prepare for jobs in program administration. Curriculum courses might emphasize that their planning and evaluation skills--defining objectives, negotiating with interested constituencies, determining degree of fit between objectives and activities, choosing evaluative criteria, for example--can be applied to industrial training and human service programs as well as to schools. Courses in educational media should be expanding to include computer programming and application, and therein be valuable to many technology-based industries. Knowledge about special populations, such as handicapped, intellectually advanced, and bilingual children, and knowledge about special curriculum areas, such as multicultural and affective education, can be conveyed to parents, administrators, and community agencies in consultatant or advocate roles. Field placements can be revised to include settings besides schools: State Departments of Education, parent or community groups, law offices, businesses, social service planning bodies, cultural organizations, and the like.

At Curry College, one senior who did not foresee a future as

a successful, happy teacher, but who was nonetheless committed to education, completed a field placement in lieu of student teaching with the Massachusetts Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education. She intends to pursue a career as legal consultant to parents of children needing psecial services. A student interested in bringing to the schools the resources of museums, arts associations, theater and dance groups, musicians, and the like, could apply her knowledge of curriculum,pedagogy and classroom management to help organize a successful collaboration. Education program graduates might be employed by local schools committees, state boards, or agencies to conduct research on, for example, alternative afterschool programs or removing sex bias from school curricula. Others schooled in computer applications might work for industries which develop educational software or which use computers in their staff training. Such options as these should be regularly available as field placements or as career goals to those not wishing to elect the usual student teaching route.

Certain aspects of education programs may present some problems even for this modest program expansion. One is the concern with specifying teaching competencies, a concern reflected in many-paged requirements for teaching certification. In Massachusetts, teacher education programs must offer three semester-long field placements to satisfy a 24-item checklist of student-teaching competencies. Ensuring teacher competency is certainly necessary. This degree of specificity, however, and the concomitant omission of other, perhaps not-so-easily measured criteria for good teaching (for instance, familiarity with the stock of cultural knowledge; humane philosophy and attitude; creativity in thinking and planning; general sense of educational purpose; and sense of social respon-

sibility) are not without cost. First, they arguably discourage students from taking courses that would enhance their personal development and broaden the framework of knowledge they take with them into the classroom. Second, this specificity limits the options available to faculty to support students in extra-classroom field experiences.

Underlying these problems is a philosophical difference between what State Departments of Education conceive to be educational knowledge and the broader concept presented in this paper. To some extent this tension can, and should, be addressed within the university through dialogue and imaginative collaboration among the faculty of all relevant departments. Discussion should focus on ways to satisfy college course requirements, state certification requirements and courses related to careers in education. While the content of such discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be readily acknowledged that faculty can create new ways of satisfying these objectives with dual- or multi-purpose courses, for example by viewing one course as satisfying several purposes. In the case of supervision needs for new field placements, field experience directors can develop a variety of sites, and supervision can be shared by on-site staff in cooperation with appropriate faculty advisors.

The proposed expansion of education program offerings requires willing and imaginative collaboration on the part of the faculties of various departments within a college or university. Traditional jealousies, status differentials, and competition for students may make collaboration problematic. In addition, the relationship between education and other areas of study has generally been perceived as a one-sided advantage for education. Yet,

the study of American schooling has much to offer the disciplines of history, political science, psychology, sociology, and economics, to name only a few. Management and human service programs have working models (for better or worse) in the varieties of configurations of school systems in this country. Moreover, in these days of shrinking enrollments and diminished resources, it might benefit some departments to make some of their courses available and attractive to education majors.

The approach outlined here may recall two well-aired concerns. First, it might appear to involve a watering-down of education programs, incurring the fear that faculty and resources would be spread too thin to provide adequate service to students. This may have happened in some programs which changed their focus to human services, and subsequently blurred that focus. In response to that concern, we must retain our commitment to education even as we expand our assumptions about its fields of practice. This program proposal entails more an attitude that encourages students to take some courses in other departments than it does a revising of courses offered by education faculty. What is really required of the education faculty is a changed consciousness, a willingness to consider that educational knowledge and skills are the business of several fields of work and a willingness to participate in developing new field settings for the practice of that knowledge and those skills.

Second, the proposal might appear to some to widen the historical rift between theory and practice, by separating educational knowledge from its fields of application. In fact, the rift has been mostly a matter of degrading theory as unrealistic and, therefore, inapplicable to educational practice. One current

response to this rift has been to base teacher education in the field and apply theory as warranted. This, to my mind, may further devalue the theoretical knowledge base by making it narrow and piecemeal. I would rather see theory developed in light of a variety of real conditions, rather than bounded by only classroom considerations, and explicit connections made in many contexts of practice. Broadening the spectrum of concern will develop a knowledge base which will in fact be more realistic because of its addressing more of the real conditions which surround classroom practice. Teachers would benefit from exposure to a knowledge base which includes, for example, administrative concerns and the concerns of parents, community groups, legislative bodies, and industry-related training.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education wants us to find ways to attract better students to education and train them better. Schools want to retain the better teachers. Teacher organizations want the public to see teaching in a better light, as a professional occupation. Were we to broaden the visions of education students and education faculty to consider that educational knowledge is relevant to fields of work other than teaching, we would improve the status and development of that knowledge base, the conception teachers have of what they know, and the status of teaching as well. It is important to help educators see themselves as knowledgeable professionals able to contribute in many ways to the society.

Much research has documented the sad fact that teaching has often been a constrained occupational choice, especially for young women who could not conceive of other realistic and appropriate alternatives.[7] The awareness that one has chosen to apply educational

knowledge to the marvelous world of children in schools from among a list of alternative possibilities strengthens one's self-respect and one's vision of his or her capabilities and potential social contributions. I have elsewhere expressed my concern that teachers broaden their perceptions of role and responsibility.[8] Great strides can be made in changing the general perception of education and teaching by understanding that educational knowledge is a commodity valuable to many fields of work and that teaching is just one of the many things one might do with an education degree. And, inthis case, minimal program changes can go far toward accomplishing this changed perception.

Notes

1. D. Ravitch, The Revisionists Revised: A Critique of the Radical Attack on the Schools (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

2. P.W. Jackson, Life in Classrooms (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).

3. H.S. Broudy, The Real World of the Public Schools (New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), p. 43.

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7. Lortie, op. cit., p. 35; and R. Smuts, Women and Work in America (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 19.

8. M.B. Sherr, "Teacher Self-Esteem and Social Vision: Conceptions of Role and Responsibility," a paper presented at the AESA Convention, November, 1981.